

THE JOURNAL

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Cover image: 15th-century German *Pauper's Bible*, side by side with a 19th-century Japanese novel, both printed with a single woodblock for each page. See article by Michael Taylor.

EDITOR'S NOTES ON THIS ISSUE

David Wertheimer

Welcome to the Spring, 2018 issue of *The Journal of the Book Club of Washington.*

Every book has its own story to tell. That story is not just about the contents as carefully crafted by authors, (and sometimes illustrators), but also about how the printer created a volume targeting a specific market or set of audiences, how contemporary readers reacted to the work, how subsequent readers interpreted (or misinterpreted) the author's original message – even the significance of notes various readers have scribbled in the margins through the years.

The stories that old and rare books have to tell us is one of the reasons that we love to collect. Just as some Eastern religious traditions tell us that each of us is the totality of what we have experienced, books are the collective totality of what they have experienced – from the emergence of words in an author's mind, to the paper on which the words are immortalized, to the ways in which those words have at times changed the course of human history, sometimes for better, at other times for worse.

In this issue of *The Journal of the Book Club of Washington*, the reader will experience several distinct aspects of why we are all so fascinated by books and related ephemera – even in an era in which we can access the contents of almost any book online. We are intrigued by the story each volume has to tell us based on the unique history of what it has experienced.

Michael Taylor, a new BCW member and the recently appointed curator of Special Collections at Western Washington University, describes for us the messages that can be extracted not only from the contents of a book, but from the specific physical characteristics and construction of a volume, and how he uses these messages to challenge those who study with him to think differently and carefully about history, culture and human experience. His perspective has enriched my own understanding of what it means to curate rare books in a university environment focused on the education of its students.

It's particularly delightful that this issue includes material from the frontiers of this nation that is being published, for the first time, in English. Nils Dickmann has prepared for our readers a translation of

an article written by 19th century Pacific Northwest settler Hermann Rotermundt for an audience back at home in his native Germany. This fascinating document provides remarkable insights into the true hardships of frontier living that counters the all too often romanticized versions of the story that disregard the harsh economic and environmental realities of the Old West. Rotermundt's reflections also capture poignantly the challenges encountered by specific communities, social environments and jobs that were highly segregated by race, gender and class.

In this issue I offer a reflections on a recent addition to my own collection of 15th century printed books. *Consilia Contra Judeos Fenerantes* (Venice, 1481), is an unusual volume that articulates a twisted theological justification for the role and place of the Jewish moneylender that fueled the anti-Semitism that was a hallmark of medieval Europe, and helped to inform and justify marginalization of a community that continues to be manifest in political and social contexts well into the present era.

Finally, Claudia Skelton offers of a vision into the rich setting of the antiquarian book fair – the place where collectors, dealers, and lovers of old books gather to share a cornucopia of old and rare books that embody the collective experience of why we are so passionate about these volumes. She captures the sights, sounds and energy of these gatherings that explains why, in an era when every collector could pursue their interests and make purchases in front of their computers without ever leaving their homes, we still like to gather to share our stories and put our eyes and hands directly on the objects of our collecting passions.

There are those who maintain that printed books will, before long, be as obscure and irrelevant as the buggy whip. As long as there are collectors like all of us who remain fascinated by the stories that come alive when we have an old book in our hands, we will continue to challenge this belief, and help to ensure that books themselves remain central to the living history of our species.

So, please do enjoy the materials that follow. Ponder how, for each of us, our passion for collecting books is helping to preserve and protect aspects of human experience that allow us to learn from, and hopefully not repeat, the lessons that can be gained when we use our libraries to inform and enrich our intellects and imaginations.

David Wertheimer, Editor
The Journal of the Book Club of Washington



WHY RARE BOOKS MATTER: PERSPECTIVES OF A RARE COLLECTIONS LIBRARIAN

Michael Taylor

Step into the main library at Western Washington University and a large totem pole will be the first thing that catches your eye. Standing proud over the thousands of students and scholars who file past it every day, it was carved by Dale James, a member of the local Lummi Nation, shortly before his death in 1996. Three figures, the Thunderbird, the Bear, and the Steelhead, speak to the rich oral tradition of the native peoples of the Northwest. Though no words are written on it, the pole oozes with meaning and contains, in its own way, as much information as any book in the library. The viewer's task is to find the story within.

As a born-again believer in the materiality of books, I can hardly imagine a better object to place at the entrance to a library. Like Dale James's totem pole, books, too, invite us to seek stories that are often no less powerful for being unwritten. Rare books, in particular, reward the researcher who digs deep into the circumstances of their production, reception, symbolic meaning, historical function, and other things separate from the main body of text that reveal themselves not through words (or words alone), but through a book's physical presence. What stories do rare books inspire us to explore that modern editions, digital surrogates, or even other copies of the same books do not? Can a book's material form serve as a starting point for



This magnificent totem pole by Dale James, greets each visitor to the Western Washington University Library.

understanding how an author's ideas intersect with the larger currents of history? Can the concrete shed light on the conceptual?

These are questions that I love to encourage students to think about. In a presentation on "Why Rare Books Matter" that I have delivered many times in my career as a special collections librarian, I offer examples of what we can learn by viewing textual content alongside all of the other ways that books communicate information. To get things started, I ask students if they have ever taken a course on public speaking and learned that communication is not 100% verbal. Our tone of voice, facial expressions, and posture, for example, can speak volumes and give our words a different meaning than might be conveyed if someone were only reading a transcript of what we said. The same concept, I point out, applies to books. Though we value books primarily for the texts they contain, nonverbal information can influence the way we perceive those texts.

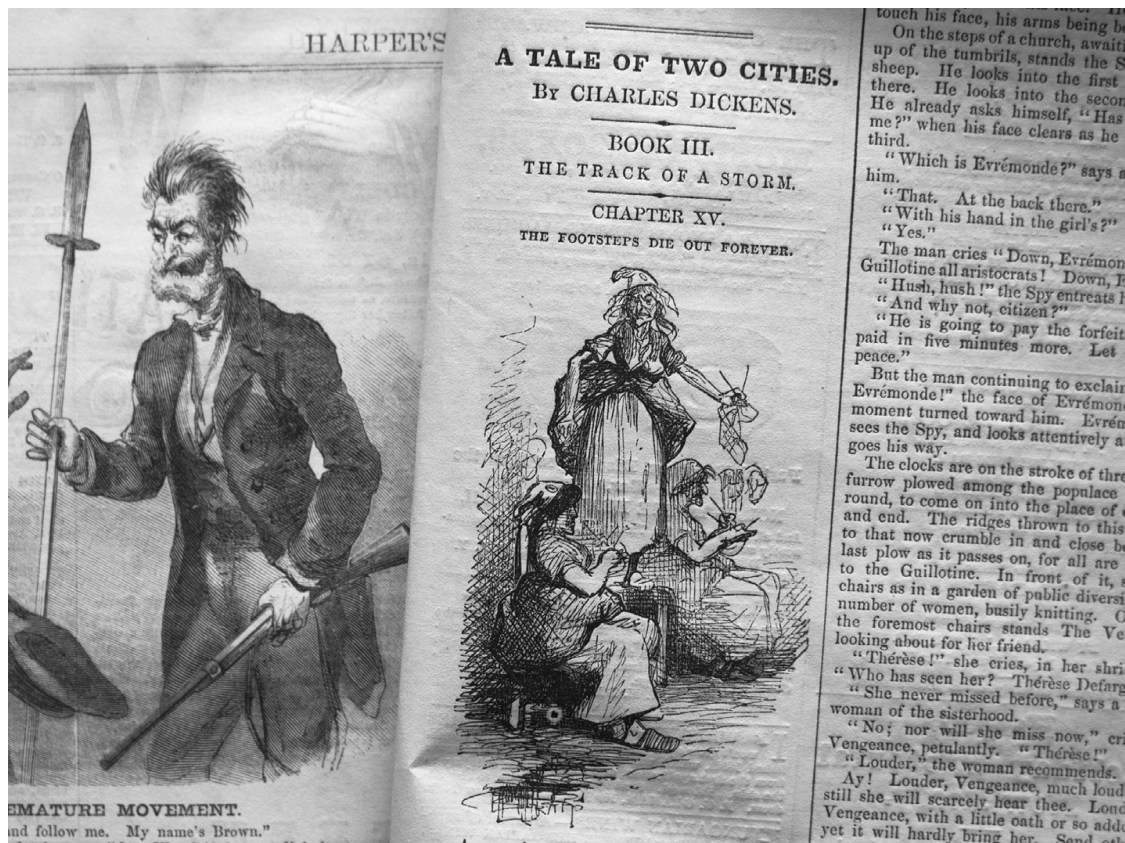
One of my favorite teaching tools, a blindfold, helps drive this point home. I ask for a volunteer to put the blindfold on and then describe two books using only his or her sense of touch. The first book is a *Gideon's New Testament*. Students notice its small size, thin paper, light weight, and artificial leather cover, and are usually able to guess what the book is without actually seeing it. I then hand out the second book. It feels almost exactly the same as the first, but everyone is always surprised to learn what it is: *Chairman Mao's Little Red Book*.

The purpose of the activity is to demonstrate, in the words of Harvard English professor Leah Price (from whom I adapted this exercise), that "Words are only one of the channels through which a book conveys information. Some of that information instructs us, perhaps even subconsciously, in how or even where and when to use a book."¹ The low cost and portability of these two volumes, detectable with our fingertips alone, reveals their function (in this case, as tools for proselytizing). The plastic covers, moreover, anticipate the need for a durable material that will stand up to frequent use and be easy to clean. By removing one of our senses, the blindfold, paradoxically, helps us see the importance of the visual clues that books contain. The green binding of the *Gideon's Bible* indicates that the book is for distribution on college campuses. The bright red covers of Mao's book of quotations clearly signify communism.

From here, I help students build on their knowledge by showing them how they can apply the same technique of examining books through the lens of material culture to books from long ago. To open their eyes to the possibilities, I am continually gathering examples that answer British librarian David Pearson's question, "What do books offer

us beyond their texts?”² Dante, in my experience, is a great place to start. Setting a facsimile of an early manuscript of the *Divine Comedy* alongside printed editions of the same text visualizes how the experience of reading this work changed over time. For example, on some pages of the 1578 Sessa edition, Dante’s stanzas are practically lost amid the surrounding commentary, which shows the importance placed at that time on understanding the history, theology, and philosophy behind the poem. In contrast, by the time we get to Gustave Doré’s late-nineteenth-century illustrated edition, the brooding, full-page wood engravings and near absence of footnotes hint that the *Divine Comedy* had become, by then, primarily a source of leisure reading.

Charles Dickens is another author who supplies good examples of why rare books matter. Any Dickens novel published in installments allows us to step back in time and understand that reading a book like *Little Dorrit*, when it first came out in 1855, was not unlike watching episodes of *Downton Abbey* today, in that the story appeared in parts and ended on a cliffhanger as a way of holding the audience’s attention. Each part also had printed wrappers with ads for everything from beer and bonnets to fire poker and cemetery plots, foreshadowing modern TV commercials.



Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* was first published in the United States in *Harper's Weekly*, alongside news accounts of the trial of abolitionist John Brown.

Looking at historical copies of another Dickens novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, likewise helps us reconstruct the social and historical context in which readers originally encountered the story. The novel was first published in the United States not in book form but in installments in *Harper's Weekly*. Reading it in a modern or even another nineteenth-century edition, we would miss the fact that it came out at the same time that John Brown was on trial for attempting to start a slave rebellion at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. At the end of the final chapter, published on December 3, 1859, the novel's hero, Sydney Carton, famously says, just before going to the guillotine: "I see the lives for which I lay down my life, peaceful, useful, prosperous, and happy... I see that I hold a sanctuary in their hearts, and in the hearts of their descendants, generations hence... It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known." These words echo a statement by Brown that he would gladly sacrifice his life in the abolition of slavery. Chillingly, Brown himself was executed just one day after the American serialization of *A Tale of Two Cities* ended. Was this a coincidence or something more? We may never know, but this example shows how reading a book in its original context can raise questions that other sources do not.

Sometimes, something as simple as a book's size and shape can yield insight into its story. To demonstrate this to students, I use a slide projector to show digital images of the title pages of two books—Matthew Prior's *Poems on Several Occasions* (1718) and Michael Drayton's *Poems* (1637). Students then pretend that they have found the images in an electronic database like Early English Books Online and are viewing them on a laptop. In real life, which of the two books is bigger, I ask? Using the digital surrogates, there is no way to know that Prior's book is a large folio that could only be read on a table, while Drayton's is quite small and unassuming. From this, we could theorize that the high cost of the paper needed to publish Prior's work meant that this volume is a document of patronage and prestige, an idea borne out by the subjects of many of the poems. The modest dimensions of Drayton's book, in contrast, mirror the intimate, inward-looking nature of his poetry, as well as his struggle to achieve acclaim. While a researcher would obviously need to bring in other sources, these books show how the physical packaging of a text can be a starting point for examining aspects of its history that otherwise might not be apparent.

Other elements of book design can lead us in the same direction. For example, many early editions of Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Sir Philip Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* have elaborately engraved title pages rich with classical imagery. The books'

visual similarities express the conscious and subconscious values of their time. They also situate Sidney's poem in its broader cultural context, signaling that its author was trying to import Italian Renaissance ideals and do for poetry what others in England were doing for art, architecture, music, and manners. The first edition of William Dampier's *A Voyage to New Holland* (1703) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) offer further examples of how juxtaposing one book with another can tell us something about each that we cannot get by looking only at one. In this case, both works contain maps of the not yet fully charted coast of Australia. By mimicking not only the narrative conventions but even the physical appearance of contemporary travelogues, Swift's fictional tale was set up in a way that would trick readers, at least initially, into thinking it was true. Thus, the original "packaging" of Swift's satire, inspired by Dampier's account, may have added to its effectiveness.

Many authors have little say in how their texts are presented to the reading public, and all, in time, lose control completely. As Michael Suarez noted in his recent TED Talk, "Authors do not write books. Authors produce manuscripts that communities of makers turn into books."³ John Keats was just twenty-five when he died, meaning that the decisions about how to publish his works fell to others. His earliest editors wanted him to be taken seriously as a poet and therefore packaged his works in a plain but dignified way, with essays and commentary to guide readers. By the turn of the twentieth century, Keats had become a favorite of the Aesthetic movement. Editions of his works from that time period, such as W.B. Macdougall's 1898 edition of *Isabella, or, The Pot of Basil*, are frequently decorated in a way that plays up the sensual and at times erotic nature of Keats's verse; editorial commentary, furthermore, is reduced or eliminated. The Golden Cockerell Press edition of *Lamia, Isabella, and The Eve of Saint Agnes* (1928) is printed on vellum and bound in sharkskin, making it a delight to touch, while one unique copy of the otherwise somber-looking 1853 Moxon edition hides a dirty little secret—an erotic double fore-edge painting—that shows how readers eventually thwarted early Victorian judgments about how Keats should be read. A Norton anthology or poetry website, needless to say, fails to communicate any of this backstory. Their texts have been, in Suarez's words, "stripped of all their color and historical particularities."

The insight that we can gain by scrutinizing books' physical attributes is limited, to some extent, only by our imaginations. Comparing and contrasting how books from around the world are produced can be particularly eye-opening and also dissuade us from placing Europe and America too much at the center. Partly for this reason, I have begun building a collection on "the global book" at

Western Washington University (WWU). The fact that different world cultures independently came up with similar book production processes, or maintained one tradition even after it died out elsewhere, fascinates me. For example, parchment codices, identical in many respects to those produced in medieval Europe, were still being made



15th-century German Pauper's Bible, side by side with a 19th-century Japanese novel, both printed with a single woodblock for each page.

in Ethiopia in the twentieth century. Though Japan kept its doors tightly shut to foreigners for more than 200 years, printers there successfully integrated text and image in the same way that block books were produced in fifteenth-century Germany; the Japanese also hit upon the idea of colorfully illustrated publishers' bindings at roughly the same time as Europeans. Quranic writing boards, cousins of the British and American hornbook, are still being used in Islamic schools in some parts of Africa, while in Southeast Asia, palm leaf manuscripts provide an ingenious alternative use of the engraving process. In all of these cases, the tangible medium of communication is more important than textual content in shaping our conclusions.

Artists' books demonstrate this in an especially dramatic way. As part of a recent class visit to WWU's Special Collections, one student hypothesized that the non-decaying plastic used to make *The Silent Host*, an artist's book about the Ardennes American Cemetery in Belgium, represents the enduring impact of soldiers' sacrifice in World War II. We can read symbolic meaning, of course, into virtually any book. A personal favorite is John Sturt's 1717 edition of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Completely engraved rather than printed with moveable type, this enormously expensive undertaking was dedicated to and intended to impress the Prince and Princess of Wales, thus symbolizing the power of the royal family to grant patronage and, by extension, wealth and advancement. Books, in the end, are not just about texts, but also art and design; they are expressive objects in the broadest sense of the term. To say that because a book is easily available in a cheap modern edition, we do not need a historical edition, might be to miss the point.

The same holds true for copy-specific information such as inscriptions, evidence of reading, and any ways that a book has been personalized. In a previous position, I explored a number of printed scores of works by Mozart. Dating from the early nineteenth century, the editions are of no interest to modern performers but contain ownership marks that tie them to a particular time and place (antebellum New Orleans and St. Louis) and allow us to paint a picture of how immigrants were able to recreate elements of European culture in the Mississippi Valley. Collecting multiple copies and certainly more than one historical edition of a work can also be worthwhile; if those editions contain traces of former readers, all the better. For example, looking at the subscriber list in the 1796 first edition of Fanny Burney's novel *Camilla*, we would get the impression that the book's readership was mostly an elite English audience. One copy of the 1797 New York edition, however, contains bookplates and inscriptions that reveal that Burney's story was not only reprinted on the other side of the Atlantic, but also taken, around 1810, to Baton Rouge, a frontier outpost in what was then the Spanish colony of Florida. Because of this one unique copy, our appreciation of the author's achievement grows. From it, we learn that Fanny Burney, one of the first women to make a career out of writing, was not just being read in Britain, but also on the edge of the American wilderness. It shows, too, how rare books can augment the archival record, especially if we treat them as physical artifacts and tease out the unwritten side of their story.

Another favorite example of how taking the "material turn" sometimes challenges our assumptions about when, where, and how books were used is an eighteenth-century copy of *Il pastor fido*, a popular tragicomedy written more than 100 years earlier by Giovanni Battista Guarini. A previous owner personalized this copy by having it bound together with an Italian language method, suggesting that he or she was less interested in the content of Guarini's play than in using it as a tool for language learning. The example shows yet again that books are unruly objects that resist our efforts to pin them down to one single time and place.

Many books, of course, whether or not they catch our eye from a material culture perspective, "matter" because of the historical functions they played. Like artifacts in a museum, books can be a way of recovering history through objects. I used to work in a library that had a collection of old law books that, at first glance, seemed out of scope and not very interesting. When I delved into their history, however, I found that they are actually right at home because they had once been used by a Western political boss to amass huge tracts of land and displace the local Hispanic population. In that sense, the volumes could be considered "artifacts of empire" that sowed the seeds of cultural conflict that is still

with us. Another book that, at first glance, may seem unimportant but nevertheless played a small part in getting us to where we are today is Charles Foster's *First Steps for Little Feet in Gospel Paths*. In his 1886 account of his pioneering missionary work among the Indians of Washington Territory, Myron Eells, son of Whitman College founder Cushing Eells, wrote that "For eight years I failed to find what was a real success." Foster's book, with its numerous pictures, eventually opened the door for him to a society that had no tradition of reading but placed great value on storytelling and images. Though it takes some digging to discover, this tattered little volume was among the cast of characters that, for better or worse, shaped our state.

It is notable, too, that Eells, like the Native Americans among whom he spent most of his life, recognized that stories start in many places, not just with words on a page. Our job as booklovers is to help others see that. Though we cannot travel back in time, we can encounter objects from eras gone by and use them to better understand what our forebears valued and how they communicated, whether verbally or visually. As we move deeper into the digital age, we must be careful not to sacrifice complexity in the name of convenience. After all, it is the complexity of history that makes it so endlessly intriguing.



Biography of author

Michael Taylor is Special Collections Librarian at Western Washington University. He holds graduate degrees in history and library science from Indiana University and has received additional training from Rare Book School (University of Virginia) and California Rare Book School (UCLA). Located in historic Wilson Library, WWU's Special Collections is a unit of the library's Division of Heritage Resources, which works to support teaching, learning, and research through documenting the history of our community, region, and world.

Notes

1. Leah Price, *Book Sleuthing*. Online course, www.edx.org, 2018.
2. David Pearson, *Books as History: The Importance of Books beyond their Texts*. London: British Library, 2011.
3. TEDx Talks. *Glorious Bookishness*. YouTube, Feb. 14, 2018. <https://youtu.be/P92ZXth8iRs>.



CONDITIONS IN CALIFORNIA AS THEY REALLY ARE: AN ORIGINAL CORRESPONDENCE

Herman Rotermundt

Introduction: Nils Dickmann

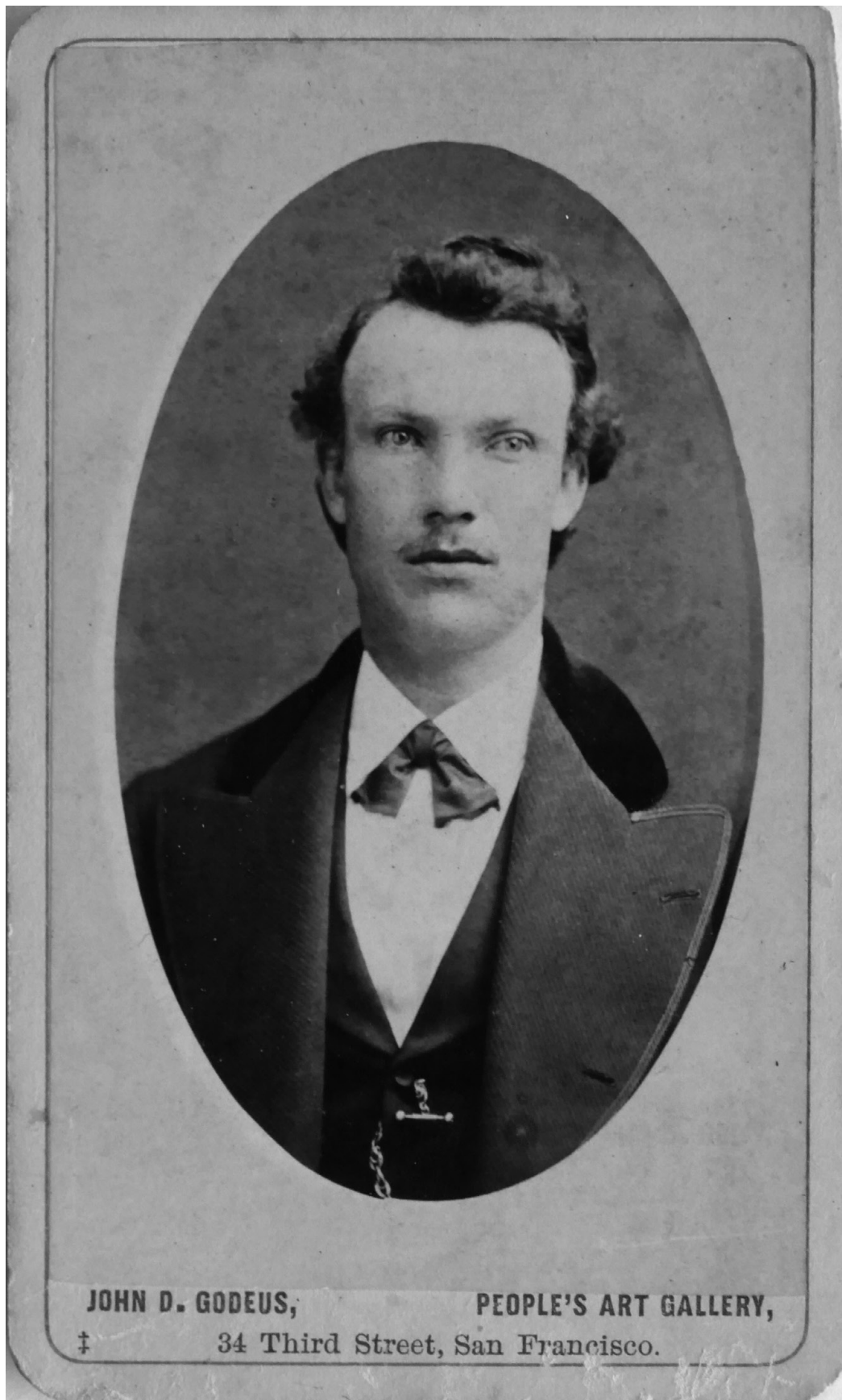
Immigration is what built this country. The following piece is a snapshot into a 100-year-old United States seen through the eyes of a relatively new immigrant. The author was the 32-year-old Herman Rotermundt from Hamburg, Germany. He was a machinist by training, working in San Francisco. In 1876, the year the article was written, Rotermundt had been in California for seven years, having arrived in 1869. He was still a bachelor. Rotermundt describes the struggles he saw in the general population and the small odds of finding success in the now 26-year-old, well-established State of California. His frustration spills out quite clearly and the article he sent home was meant to discourage others to follow him to California. Indeed he asks those thinking of emigrating to consider making a better life for themselves in the old country.

This article, written in German originally, was sent back home to Hamburg where it appeared in a relatively well-known socialist newspaper, the *Hamburg-Altonaer Volksblatt*.¹ Fortunately this article survived by having been clipped and pasted into the rear of Mr. Rotermundt's manuscript journal describing his journey from Hamburg to San Francisco via the Cape of Good Hope with a lengthy stop in Indonesia.

In 1879, Rotermundt ended up leaving San Francisco and starting a new adventure in his life by moving to Arlington, Washington, where he kept a farm. In 1889, Rotermundt married Dorothea Bildhauer also of Germany and they had one daughter, Sophia, who passed away childless in 1960. Rotermundt died in Arlington in 1916.

(Editor's Note: We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Nils Dickmann for his painstaking translation of this article, which for the first time appears in English, making it accessible to the contemporary American reader.)





This Carte de Visite photograph is dated 1874 on the reverse and carries the inscription (translated from German): "Herman Rotermundt born in Hamburg 30 years old". Herman Rotermundt would have been in California five years already when this image was made

Heave boys, hurrah!
For California
Five Dollars and a half is white man's pay.
There is plenty of gold,
So I have been told,
On the bay and the Sacramento.

So sang our sailors as they lifted the anchor on the docks of Surabaya and it was announced that the vessel's next port was San Francisco. California still has a good ring in the ears of many, the gold country, where poverty is not conceivable and with goodwill and intact limbs, all work done is amply compensated. In past years, about 1849 - 1860, where digging gold was still possible for the poor farmer it might even have been an Eldorado. When the announcement: "Gold! Gold!" was made, residents from the Eastern parts of the United States trekked across the Prairies in long caravans, despite Indians and harsh conditions. Thousands more sailed from South America, Chileans and Europeans, and entire fleets left New York and the emigration ports in Europe. All streamed into the mountains, searched through the gorges and washed ochre colored golden sand, however with varying and ever changing success. On the whole, they were not disappointed although some gave their life or their health in the deal. Some gambled and lost the quickly acquired treasures, others left California again with full pockets, and many also remained on the Pacific coast in hopes of gaining independence and prosperity with the rapidly burgeoning country. In earlier years, there were almost exclusively so-called "surface diggings", i.e. easily accessible layers of gold-bearing soil, later one began to also work in tunnels in the deeper-lying river beds of past periods. This certainly required starting capital. The so-called "hydraulic mines", where a strong jet of water washes away all hillsides towards the Valley and where water often must be brought from long distances, came later. So for example a line in Placer County had a length of 46 English miles. The ore mines were very neglected during the first years, how to approach the rebellious rock was still unknown and real mining such as in the Harz mountains and in Saxony, took its rise with the discovery of the immensely rich "Comstock lode" whose discoverer Comstock incidentally died recently in deepest poverty. Exploiting these mines without capital would not be conceivable, and the profits sounded like a story from the fairy tale "1001 nights". For the latest discoveries, the "Bonanza mines", the "Consolidated Virginia" company made 89-and-a-half-million dollars in "bullion" (gold bars) from the beginning of 1874 until September 1876, and delivered \$23.3 million dollars as dividends to their shareholders. The company, which controls this section of the Comstock deposits, is called Flood, O'Brien & Co.; four Irishmen by birth, two of them miners

by profession, the other two used to own a Whiskey bar in San Francisco, and they all came to their wealth, according to public opinion, almost exclusively by chance and luck.

Without exhausting this register, I would like to mention A.D. Sharon, famous owner of the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, built at an estimated cost of no less than 5 million dollars, perhaps the largest hotel in the world. And another mining speculator, Baldwin, also used a part of his funds, namely \$2.3 million dollars, on the construction of a hotel and completed "the Baldwin." And there are also Hayward or Jones whose income totaled \$800,000 - \$900,000 dollars per month from the mines, and many more profited likewise.

The actual "surface diggings," the work places of the independent gold diggers, were initially very productive, but were soon depleted, and the hundreds of thousands of immigrants, unless they had been hired as wage laborers, turned their attention to other income sources available in the country and so gradually brought livestock, agriculture, and industry to California. The building of capital is given plenty of free space in the United States, as the same is not affected by traditional laws and institutions; this is especially true in a new land such as California. Just like in other Pacific Ocean coastal areas, the attention of capitalists soon focused on the cheap Chinese workers, as soon as they realized that the Chinese with their undemanding needs would be highly profitable to use as workers; they imported Chinese and used them at first perhaps for digging gold and later in agriculture and industry. In many cases the Chinese displaced white workers from their employment and made it impossible for them to work because to work for the same low pay is the equivalent to moral and physical decay for the white worker. California's population amounts to about 800,000. Of these 60,000 are Mexicans, half-blood and Indians, and the former settled on this coast more than 100 years ago as we know. 80,000 are Chinese, even the newspapers concede that much, but actually there are 120,000 - 130,000; all working people in their best years, because the elderly and weak are taken back to China at the expense of the Chinese companies. Chinese women number about 4,000, mostly prostitutes in San Francisco. This Chinese agricultural army is certainly of a frightening percentage set against the actual white population, and the white capitalists were of course very comfortable with this. In the course of time, they brought the lion's share of the State of California under their control; in the north the Redwood Forests, the mines in the mountains, and in the south the livestock. Many individuals called much more land their own than did the German princes and other nobility.

The company Lux and Miller for example, both Germans by

birth, owns over 800,000 acres in different parts of the State, where an acre is about equal to a Prussian 'Morgen' (about ¼ to ½ hectare). Just to give you an idea of two of their farms in the San Joaquin Valley: One stretches 125 English miles in length and includes 128,000 acres, which are surrounded by a continuous fence according to Californian laws. The other bagatelle is six miles wide and has a length of 50 miles. Lux and Miller are butchers by profession and the largest part of their land is used for cattle breeding. The cattle population is 140,000 cattle, 150,000 sheep and 3,000 horses.

When the fathers of the Republic drew up the *Constitution of the United States*, they decided on 160 arable acres as the most Government land which an individual citizen could claim; they wanted to prevent that land ownership got concentrated in the hands of a few individuals and that a company such as Lux for example might acquire land, that should become a home to 5,000 American settlers. In California this land grab was already initiated by the so-called "Mexican Grants" where large and usually fertile areas had been donated by the Mexican Governors to individual families before the annexation of California to the United States. This is how land came in the hands of today's tycoons because of the earlier actions of a people that enjoyed life and did not speculate on later developments.

The most powerful Corporation in the State is the Central Pacific Railroad Company, which controls a tremendous amount of capital. It has covered California with a rail network and crushed any competitor in the making. As a result it determines high rates for cargo and for passenger, and taxes the country and in a way the small farmers according to their possessions. Its hands rest on the pulse of business life, and what is noteworthy, seen from a European viewpoint, is that the company not only changes freight rates in favorable years, but also has different prices for different people and destinations. Consistently freight rates correspond with the wheat harvest; so in a successful wheat season the farmer has to share his profit with the Company. Adjacent to their railroad tracks, the Company probably has a million or more acres of Government land. This the government gave to them as a way to subsidize their railways by means of machinations and bribery. The railway is typically the pioneer of civilization. In this case however the advantages from the construction of the Central Pacific railway did not nearly outweigh the disadvantages to the American citizens because the corporation was given such outrageous concessions and land. Moreover, the company built the whole of their 2,000 English miles long railway with a Chinese labor force.

To give readers an idea of the wealth of the Executive Board of



German gathering at August Lammers residence in Arlington in summer or fall of 1900. August Lammers was the first president of the Arlington Cooperative Association; a dairy coop in Arlington originally joining 32 dairy farmers together to market their products jointly. Herman and Dorothea Rotermundt are in the last row to the left of the porch column. Daughter Sophie, aged 10 in this picture, sits in the front row 3rd from the left.

this railway, here are some facts on their princely palaces that I gathered from one of the evening papers. Mr. Leland Stanford, Mr. Charles Crocker and Mr. Mark Hopkins, built their houses on California Street in San Francisco on a hill which offers a magnificent panorama of the city and bay. Construction costs amounted to \$7 million; about 28 million marks. Regarding the amenities, for example, each of the six bathrooms in one of these magnificent buildings cost \$4,000; a step ladder in the library \$150, etc. An interesting side note specifically regarding the palace of Mr. Crocker is the massive 35 foot wooden wall in the midst of his property, which on three sides wraps around a quite modest two-story house. The explanation is as follows: The owner of this house and property asked a slightly higher purchase price than the railroad director thought it worth where upon he blocked out his daylight and open air on three sides. The little house is now, with exception of its small frontage, a sort of gigantic wooden box which has funny swirls of smoke coming out of its chimney.

I believe that California has capitalists as unique in their nature, as the waterfalls of the Yosemite Valley or the clusters of giant 400 feet tall redwood trees. Their ambitions are focused on selling the countless acres

of arable land in their possession at the highest possible prices so that later on, (and this really happens here) they receive the same land, now cultivated, back from those cheated buyers. Their other goal, however, was to create a large army of workers causing pressure on their necessities of life and wages to decrease. Even with the best intentions and despite all attempts the Chinese are not physically qualified for many jobs; they will not become settlers anyhow, but will leave the country with their saved dollars and return to their "Middle Kingdom" after a certain time.

Of course, our newspapers have an interest in attracting money and people, but the brochures that flooded the Western States, in other words Kansas, Iowa, Missouri etc., two years ago were nothing short of a downright swindle. It misled 1,000 farmers, who were living in tolerable conditions where they were located, to sell their belongings and live "a worry-free life under the blue skies of California". Added to this, the efforts of the *Californischer Staatskalender 1876*, a German Almanac, which the readers of the *Hamburg-Altonaer Volksblatt* might have seen. In it, among other things, wages were enumerated in handsome order. These wages may indeed have been paid for work done, but how hard a person needs to work to receive these wages was omitted. The great injustice consists in not mentioning how unusual the ever expanding gap is between supply and demand. Here is another example of the bombastic descriptions such as those for the sale of land that one often finds in English-language newspapers.

San Bernardino is the largest, but also the most arid County in the State, and on the way from Los Angeles to the center of the place it's a distance of 67 miles. We passed a more than 30 mile long waterless stretch on the way there. The newspaper describes this area as follows: "The greatest and loveliest sceneries unite in this landscape. A beautiful mountain range runs in a vast arc and forms one of the most beautiful natural Amphitheaters in the world. In the east the "Grayback" towers high over the surrounding peaks in its mountainous majesty. And on the other side the San Jacinto, in beautifully broken lines, reach a height and grandeur above all else, with the exception of the monarch of the mountain himself. In the north the great chain of the San Bernardino, broken by large canyons of pleasing rolling hills stretches to the Cajon. Further west is the San Gabriel mountain chain, which is marvelously jagged with its many gorges and precipices, and in the West the Temescal itself, picturesquely beautiful with its conical tips, which seems to connect to the San Gabriel chain and thus separates this little gem of a valley from the outside world." To complete this picture of paradise, it would be worth mentioning that occasionally from the nearby sandy deserts of Arizona a very respectable Sirocco crosses the land making up for missing water.

To those yearning to emigrate I always want to call out: "Listen to the other side!" In the title I promised to shed light on Californian conditions as they are generally described compared to how they really are; now I want to highlight those, which I expect to be of most interest to the reader by attempting to describe first land and agriculture as it pertains to the small farmer and farm worker, and then industry and wages in the city. The mines will form another topic.

As I already indicated, the mines are in the hands of corporations and capitalists and peculiar circumstances regulate the conditions for the workers. In Virginia City, Nevada with the Comstock Lode (Silver and Gold), 6,000 feet above sea level, a miner earns \$4 per day, but the cost of living is high. Board and lodging are \$9 - \$10 per week. There is a miners' association, known as the "Miners Union", whose many members vote like-minded people into municipal positions and make it their mission to keep the pay rate unchanged for union members. They also attempt to block out Chinese workers, which has been successful until now. Incidentally, it is questionable whether the Chinese would desire or be physically qualified to work in 2,000 foot deep mine shafts with their unbearable heat plus whether the hard work of a miner would suit them. Nearby in Virginia City with its 25,000 inhabitants, there are generally 3,000 - 6,000 men without employment. The topographical nature of the State of California is contingent upon the Sierra Nevada Mountains, whose highest peak lies close to the eastern border. Smaller mountain ranges run parallel, longitudinally between the Pacific Ocean and the Sierra Nevada mountains. Thus besides some smaller valleys the two vast lowlands of the Sacramento and San Joaquin river beds were formed. It is estimated that only half of all California is arable. In the north and the area surrounding San Francisco and the Bay for 20 years land fit for agriculture has been developed. It usually consists of high-value complexes that are not overly large. Further south, along the coast, one finds in particular the aforementioned "Mexican Grants", the domain of land speculators; mainly listed in the brochures is Los Angeles County with its semi tropical climate and farm produce. Located on the 34th latitude, olives, oranges, almonds, and even individual occasional palm trees flourish. The climate is wonderful, a deep blue sky and cool nights; ice and snow are unknown. These conditions are the main factors in the eyes of residents of the Eastern States and of Europe, especially when described by an experienced pen and brought into contrast with the long, dull winter days of our north. Four months of winter and a rainy season are followed by eight months of summer heat. There is little rain then and artificial irrigation is absolutely necessary for a safe harvest. Water becomes hard to find and good land is worth fabulous prices, such as for example \$400 per acre near Los Angeles. For those with limited resources

there is no way of making a living as orange growers under this beautiful sky. Three year old orange trees cost \$3 a piece and only after 10 years of care and maintenance begin to produce.

Below see an advertisement such as can be found daily in our two English morning newspapers:

"Why are you looking for work, when you can buy a farm in monthly installments that's ideal for growing sub-tropical fruits? Only 12 Dollar monthly installments for 4 years. This is an opportunity that can make you rich quickly."

The wine-making industry in California is already dealing with overproduction, albeit some believe it will have a big future. As table fruit the grapes are excellent, but the wine is mediocre; all too often it reminds one of a Grüneberger wine from the shady-side for which there is no real markets, all efforts notwithstanding. I've seen some completely abandoned wine plantations, in others the harvest took place only to be used as cheap pig feed. The value of last year's wine production was posted at a half a million dollars and the yield at 800,000 gallons. Wool however was at \$1 million and wheat at \$45 million. California's staple product is wheat. Wheat is almost exclusively exported to Liverpool via Cape Horn and the freight rates fluctuate between 4 and 5-1/2 dollars a ton.

The great breadbasket of the state is in the aforementioned valleys of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers. Flat, level and almost without any forest, these vast valleys extend 500 - 600 miles north to south and have a width of 25 - 100 miles. With the exception of a few sandy stretches the soil here is a heavy clay, locally known as "adobe". In the blistering summer heat a solid, rock-hard crust forms which is full of cracks and crevices. Wheat ripens in the month of May and afterwards all vegetation dries up. The rainy season begins in November and only after the most torrential rains, the ground begins to loosen. This is when the farmers bring out their plows. The time of sowing requires great activity because the unique type of soil only allows manipulation under very specific conditions. Thus the window during which farmers can cultivate their fields is usually very short. Once the seed has been sown, the wheat farmer has little work in the short term, but his days are not without worry. The much needed rain may fail to materialize, or the dangerous north winds which have already beset some counties, may set in. From my own experience, I know that this wind broke the branches off of a Sycamore tree and in 15 minutes you could grind its normally juicy leaves

to dust in your hand. A farm in Schleswig-Holstein and a farm in the San Joaquin valley have little in common with each other. A wheat farmer is just a producer of wheat and nothing else; he keeps no cows, no pigs, he does not even grow the vegetables for his own needs and should he have potatoes these are grown hundreds of miles away, because in this dryness potatoes grow as poorly as do all vegetables. There is not fresh meat every day and salted meat, flour, beans and syrup all too often must suffice. The water is poor and has a hefty alkali content. Agriculture is performed here in a predatory way and leaves behind fields that are exhausted. The use of fertilizers is unknown, the swathed straw is burned and if the best ground initially gave the very respectable yield of 60 bushels per acre, after 10 years the farmer is satisfied with 20 bushels. It is a question of time, whether this regime of agriculture can be abolished or if wheat farming will come to an end, because with European wheat prices these days stall-feeding animals and utilizing the natural fertilizer are no longer possible. At harvest time, the whole valley finds itself in its most challenging activity, this is the second labor-intensive period for the farmer. The heat is oppressive. So-called "headers" which are pushed by four horses, cut the wheat and at the same time throw the ears of grain onto a wagon alongside. Then and again you see large piles of grains laying on the fields, and soon steam threshing machines pull through the countryside which thresh 600 - 1,000 bags a day each weighing 180 pounds. Wheat bags lie piled up under the open sky until their time of shipment, because rain is never expected before November. The farmer's house in the San Joaquin valley is generally a nondescript wooden building, painted white, without protective or ornamental trees and stately barns nearby – a nothing less than idyllic picture or the ideal of a countryman.

Farming is a game of chance here and the small farmer frequently gets the bad lot. He cannot own the expensive agricultural equipment himself and must procure these with a pricey lease. Often, he finds himself forced to sell his wheat, still standing in the field, to cover the ongoing expense of the harvest. While some individual farmers have become rich, the majority has loaded their property up with mortgages and a few bad years will for sure bring them ruin. Only a few years ago, in a place called Enis Station, there was a whole colony of farmers from Schleswig-Holstein, with farms ranging between 160 - 800 acres. The same folks had to leave home and hearth to once again make a new start. This year again in some areas in San Joaquin, only some two inches of rain has fallen and a total crop failure is feared. A large-scale farmer is more likely in a position to wait for better years, and there are wheat farmers who have 40,000 - 60,000 acres, often very well managed, on which vast fields of grain can be seen in good years.

The farm hand is in a worse position than the small farmer



Portrait of Dorothea Bildhauer (L) and friend Lisette von Borstel (R), ca 1889. This photograph was likely made prior to the marriage of Herman Rotermundt to Dorothea Bildhauer. This photo is from the studio of J.H. Peters at 914 Market Street, San Francisco, Cal.

because he is homeless in the truest sense of the word. Only very few have employment throughout the year, and these earn between \$20 - \$80 a month, plus meals. During the 2 to 2-1/2 months of planting season and during the 2 - 3 months of harvest season California needs an army of vigorous workers. But even with all of this work, there is never a real shortage of workers. During the planting time workers earn \$1 to \$1.25 dollars a day plus meals and during harvest time the same earn \$1.50 to \$2 dollars a day and in rare occasions the average worker can earn \$2.50 dollars a day. Machinists working on the steam combines receive \$3 to 4 dollars a day. The reader is likely asking themselves the question how the workers spend the rest of the year. Several workers who have some money or credit at their disposal stay in cheap boarding houses, but the bulk of them move from North to South and back, wherever they hope to find employment. Names such as Tramps and Blanket Brigade are peculiar to the United States, but the latter was created in California: Wool blankets make up the bed of the farm worker here, making it an imperative necessity for him to own this item unless he wants to cover himself with his good conscience, which commonly keeps nobody warm. During harvest time, the working hours for the small bands that accompany the steam combines are extremely exhausting starting at 6 in the morning and going until 8 in the evening; otherwise often from sunrise to sunset. It is easy to make conclusions about the provided meals after what was said about the farmer himself. Under these conditions it is obvious that but little hope exists for the rural worker to acquire the necessary resources to establish a homestead on Government land or even to think about marriage. Arable or accessible government land is extremely difficult to find and is only available as widely scattered parcels.

Although the great resources of the State of California have hardly been touched, the vast majority of the population is excluded from having a part of these. Large stretches of virgin soil, on which the most diverse plants could be raised and which under normal conditions would safely secure an independent existence for the American citizen, lie uncultivated. Instead, these lands are in the hands of speculators and land magnates; everywhere the small farmer sees himself dwarfed and repressed only to disappear in the end into the large armies of the proletariat. Here I believe you find the reason why the rural population is still small, in a country, the size of which is equivalent to our whole German Fatherland and yet it has only about 800,000 inhabitants of whom 300,000 live in the city of San Francisco, compared to the 500,000 that live in the interior.

At this point, I would like to ask the fair female readers for forgiveness in advance, if I skipped over the female sex with complete silence so far. I do not feel confident enough to more closely describe

the conditions of the female population. In earlier years, we used to say: "California is a good country for women, but pretty near hell for men and horses." Nowadays the first half of this humorous saying is no longer true and one can assume that it is equally hard for the female workers to find success as it is for the males. In private residences, the Chinese are employed as maids, a small minority are employed as teachers, in the mint or the telegraph service; others work for low wages in factories, such as wool mills, side by side with Chinese and children, and many eke out a puny existence by sewing. The prevailing circumstances of course mean that each year it is more and more difficult for the annually increasing number of men to start a family. The result is that the former lack of marriageable girls has stopped long ago.

Business life in San Francisco has a rapid pulse, just as it has in any central point of the United States. It is concentrated on mining and agricultural products, but industry has also made a start already, as always, primarily to supply the local demand. One impetus for the manufacturing of machinery was the boom in industrial mining, the heavy machinery for which is today almost exclusively built in San Francisco. Despite the slightly higher wages, some things can be locally fabricated at a profit, cheaper than imports from the eastern states and protected from Europe by high tariffs. Local wool is processed in two large wool mills. In the furniture industry, perhaps 1,800 men find employment. In iron foundries and machine factories around 1,000. There is a significant steel mill with a large steam hammer, in close proximity of which there is a dry dock, blasted into solid rock, that is capable of accommodating the largest steam ships. Great sugar factories are almost exclusively in German hands. Forty breweries. A large pocket watch factory. Also a large silk spinning mill which appears to be, as with silk plantations, in an experimental stage. Shoe and boot factories employ 2,000 and 120 cigar factories 9,000 workers. In the two last industries braided Chinese workers are highly prevalent and sewing machines for the manufacture of cheap clothes are also in their grip. It is amazing in how small a space a few dozen Chinese cigar workers are able to find room or how many rattling sewing machines there can be in an average size room.

The Chinese quarter, with dirty foul-smelling streets is located in the heart of the city. It actually borders on the business quarter of San Francisco, which is distinctly different from the residential area. Rent for the small businessman is therefore very high, and because of the many competitors he generally manages to make only very meager earnings. Among all residents the Chinese can be excluded as customers because they buy all they need only from their own compatriots, produce the same by themselves or order them from China. The inevitable clothing

stores by Boy or Rosenthal are as common here as elsewhere, and are taken care of with a zeal which is reminiscent of the "new Steinweg". With 40 breweries in business, we can easily conclude that there are numerous drinking establishments called "Saloons". The cheapest beer costs 5 cents per glass, otherwise 12-1/2 cents for better wines, spirits and beers. Fresh fruit and young vegetables are generally available throughout the year, and at reasonable prices. Meat costs 6 to 12 cents per pound, game 8 to 12 cents. 25 to 60 cents per dozen eggs. Butter 25 to 50 cents per pound. Fish 10 to 25 cents (sturgeon 5 cents). Smoked salmon 4 to 10 cents. Potatoes 1 to 2-1/2 cents a pound. An undemanding worker is paying \$5 to \$7 per week for board and lodging. The food is consistently good, three hot meals a day. A bedroom \$6 to \$8 per month. Eating out is very common here, as can be judged not only by the number and size of the establishments, but also by the range in prices from 15 cents per meal up to the highest prices for gourmets. Average restaurants are clean and offer a touch of elegance plus feed their customers pretty well for 25 cents.

So how about the wages of the workers? I quote a short excerpt from the before-mentioned German *Staats-Kalendar for 1877*, which lists the average worker's earnings as follows: bakers \$40 to \$75 plus meals per month, barbers \$15 to \$25 per week, accountant \$50 to \$150 per month, maids \$20 to \$35 per month, workers in cigar factories \$18 to \$25 per week, Coachman \$3 to \$4 per day, Mason \$3 to \$4, Machinist \$3 to \$5, Blacksmith \$2.50 to \$4, Tailor \$3 to \$5, Cobbler \$2.50 to \$4, Day Laborer \$2 to \$3.50, Carpenter \$3 to \$4.50, Construction worker \$3 - \$4 per day.

To the best of my knowledge the first number given would in most cases also have been the highest, especially, when one considers averages, and I am therefore convinced "Maid \$15 to \$30 per month," "Barber \$10 to \$15 per week," "worker in cigar factory depending on Chinese competition" would be correct, as well as "Waiter \$20 to \$30 per month," "Mason \$3 - \$5 per day," "Blacksmith \$2.50 to \$4," "Cobbler \$2.50 to \$3" "Carpenter \$2.50 to \$3," "Machinist \$2 to \$3," "Day laborer \$1.50 to \$2 per day." The most serious omission of the *Californischer Staats-Kalendar* is that it does not mention the huge supply of workers compared to the actual demand and that it does not address the large gaps in the work week. Plus the frequent work interruptions in factories and shops, while a partially completed contract or construction must be brought to an end with the greatest energy because of the high interest rate. Therefore as well a great army of workers must be available "behind the door" so to speak, asked to enter when needed, only to be let go when not useful any longer. Even those middle class newspapers do not deny these facts. A letter sent to the "Morning Call" in early March

for example deals with a motion in the legislature regarding the use of convicts by private entrepreneurs in various sectors of the manufacturing process. The submitter protests against this practice in the name of the trade. He maintains that masons and carpenters can only find employment 5 months of the year at the most, and that new criminals are created, if work is taken away from craftsmen and given to convicts instead.

Almost all workers are in the same situation as the above craftsmen and it is not exaggerated to assume that only 2 out of 10 have stable employment. And this where nowhere so many people including young men live, planning to become rich one day. Very many of the immigrants came to California with the intention of getting wealthy through work and thrift. Despite the inexpensive food available, working-class families just as in Germany live mainly "by hand to mouth". However, a single worker still manages to save a few dollars provided he has stable work, a frugal lifestyle, and knows how not to get caught in the traps that modern 'robbers' set successfully all too often. Fraud around mines shares comes to mind in the first place. To say more about it would lead too far; I just want to mention here that 30,000 to 40,000 people are involved in this; shady gentlemen with titles such as "Trustee", "Director of the Panther Mining Co.", the "Accredited Director of A.A. Mining - Company" and the like, especially also stock brokers.

There are many extraordinary individuals in San Francisco, sad and degrading, and it would certainly be interesting to know about the former lives of some of the city's homeless. There are numerous men here who as hard as they may try are unable to find even the most lowly employment. Certainly present conditions more than the people themselves are often more to blame that such individuals over time give up and become known as vagabonds. Shipyards, where hay is loaded become the sleeping quarters for hundreds every night, these are called "hay-bunkers" - hay sleepers, and empty houses or police shelters accommodate hundreds more. Many previously honest people thus fall lower and lower and help increase the large army of criminals. Although California used to be called the spittoon of nations, to have over 1,200 criminals in a state prison is a terrible percentage under any circumstances. I do not know how many inmates are held in California's two large asylums, but there are five times more mentally ill compared to the Eastern States. Suicide happens a lot daily and in ways and means as bizarre and unusual as a may be encountered in a city like Paris. Someone recently tried for example to put an end to his life under truly comical circumstances. He loaded his feet down with weights on a particularly high ship-yard at the port, but at the same time he attached one end of a rope around his body, the other to the dock. He left his hat behind, with

a note pinned on it saying: "Pull me up" because he probably worried that being wet too long might hurt his body. When jumping into the hereafter, however, the rope turned out to be too short and the man got hung up with the weights on his feet.

In the meantime in California social conditions are pretty comparable to those in Europe. Thirty years ago, at the time of the annexation to the United States, this beautiful land with its wonderful climate and its large mineral treasures was at the disposal of the American citizen. Now, after an unparalleled rapid development of capital, we already have a large lower class on the one hand and powerful land magnates and those boasting about their money on the other. And the education and character of the latter are not in any relationship as to the power they wield. Although the lot of the free white laborer in the southern states at the time of Negro slavery was already a sad one, worse conditions can be expected here considering the vile trafficking of the Chinese. Although I think that currently in both Europe and America there seems to be no end to the crisis, times will probably improve. In the Eastern States this will also benefit the lower sections of the population, here in California only the capitalists will benefit. Because as soon as local businesses register the first upswing, they will import the Chinese back by the hundreds and invite the whites to work either for the same wages, or to leave the country.

It is difficult to foresee how in the future the workers here will behave faced with this choice. Their different nationalities, checkered like a colorful kaleidoscope, prevent their Union. Almost every nationality has its Baroque national conceit. In San Francisco, there are two sections of the General Workers Party of the United States, a German and an English one.

At this point I believe I may conclude. Should this small work be of assistance to those tired of Europe, then it has achieved its goal. An immigrant has many difficulties to fight against, he has to go through a school of hard knocks and live through many bitter experiences and in the end remains "a stranger in a strange land". Whether with or without resources, from my vantage point, I am of the opinion that my compatriots should stay home and try to improve conditions there. What pertains to the previously mentioned brochures from the Californian Immigration Bureau and the Real Estate Associates, they call to memory the following words from a Hamburg folk-poet:

Take note my son!
With bitter crunching I feel wary
The mighty Lords will eat our cherry

And throw and the stones in our face,
So flee lest such breeding ever tempt thee,
In peace consume the hard chunks, of poverty
And in that gallows bird have no faith!



Biography of author

Books have always been a steady companion for Nils Dickmann. When he was 12 and living in Germany his interests flourished outside of just reading and he developed an insatiable appetite for antiquarian books. He also became obsessed with several aspects of book arts, such as bookbinding, marbling and calligraphy. All of these interests today are not far below the surface as he tries to balance being a hardwood lumber trader, the father of three amazing children, the husband of his wife, Carey, and a powerful lover of books. Nils and his family call the Queen Anne neighborhood of Seattle their home.

Notes

1. The following link to a contemporary painting shows a frustrated worker and reader of said paper in 1877:
http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=1438





A TIMELESS LESSON ON THE POWER OF THE PRESS: A DISCUSSION OF THE *CONSILIA CONTRA JUDEOS* *FENERANTES*

David Wertheimer

I grew up on the Lower Eastside of Manhattan, back in the days when it was still largely a Jewish ghetto that was rarely visited by anyone other than its residents, or shoppers looking for clothing bargains among the merchants on Orchard Street. When I turned 10 years old, my mother put a handful of New York City Subway tokens in my hand and said: “This is a fascinating city, David. Go explore it!” If a mother were to say that to her young child today, an eavesdropping neighbor might be inclined to call the child welfare authority. But that was 1965, it was a different era in cities like New York, and a boy could pursue his adventures without the fears that loom over our world today.

A rather odd youngster, in my journeys across the city I was quick to discover the Pierpont Morgan Library, and to become a regular visitor there. I fell in love with the treasures of their collection, and developed a particular fascination for the technology, beauty and power of the earliest printed books, known as “incunabula,” meaning “from the cradle” or “swaddling clothes.” The term refers to books printed between roughly 1455 (when the Gutenberg Bible appears) until the end of the 15th century in December of 1500.

The printing press was, arguably, the most influential invention in the western world until the advent of the personal computer. It has been argued that the printing press made possible the renaissance, the industrial revolution, and even the emergence of modern democratic governments.¹

Initially, after Church officials recovered from their terror that religious texts like the Bible would become available to a larger public readership, the printing press allowed the Church to secure an intellectual chokehold on Western thinking through the promulgation of mass-produced theological treatises such as the *Manipulus Curatorum*, which directed priests precisely how to interpret and communicate core concepts and beliefs.²

But creative uses of this new technology didn't stop there. Those opposed to the dogmatic principles of the Catholic Church quickly discovered the power of the press themselves, sowing the seeds

of divergent theological principles that promoted new conversations and powered the Reformation and related religious, social and political movements. In fact, it is not difficult to make the case that the printing press has provided the most important fuels for every major movement for social change among literate communities, at least until the emergence of the personal computer and virtual technologies that have been so effectively utilized to energize mass movements such as the Arab Spring³, or even challenge core democratic institutions like the American electoral system.⁴

As the son of trade union activists, actually collecting specimen of incunabula was well beyond my means. It wasn't until I was well into my adulthood and running my own small consulting firm that I was tempted to acquire an example of the books that so fascinated me on the shelves of the Morgan Library. Once I started collecting, however, it became a slippery slope.

My collection is focused on four key principles:

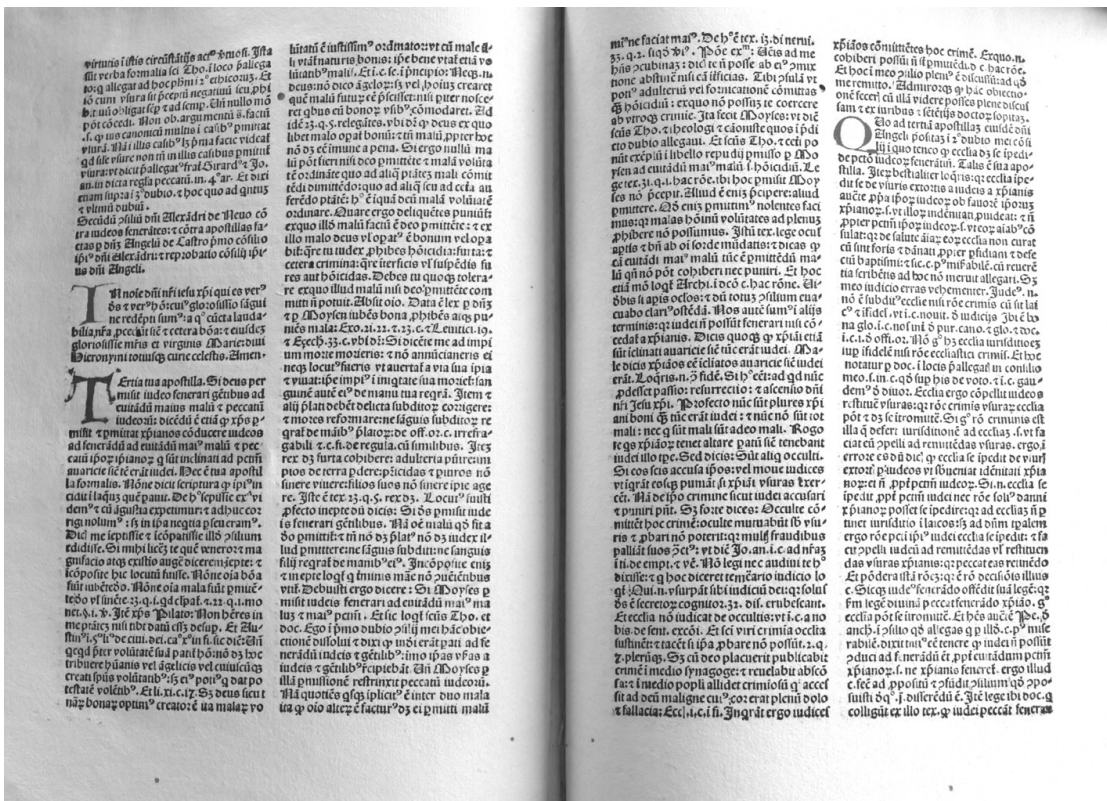
1. The book must be complete (sometimes hard for such old tomes).
2. The book must be in good condition (again, challenging after centuries of wear and tear).
3. The book must be historically significant.
4. Ideally, the book must be a volume that is still in print (i.e., so significant that it is still being read regularly more than 500 years after the copy in my own library).

These are difficult conditions to meet consistently, and sometimes one of the rules, (particularly the fourth rule), gets broken when a book catches my particular fancy. As I try to read and absorb the contents of every book in my collection, breaking the fourth rule can be frustrating, as my ability to read a text in medieval Latin pushes me far beyond the skills acquired from my study of the language more than four decades ago.

Although 90% of what was printed during the incunabula period was a theological text, I have also tried to focus on the acquisition of secular works. This makes the hunt all the more challenging. People often ask me if I have a favorite book in my collection, and I am always loath to answer that question. It depends on the topic being considered, the physical condition and appearance of the volume, and – to be honest – my mood on any given day. I enjoy each book for its unique characteristics.

In preparing an article for this issue of *The Journal of the Book Club of Washington*, I have selected one of the most recent additions to my collection that is both a theological work and a violation of my fourth rule of collecting. (You will see why, as you read this article, that this is probably a good thing.) I decided to write about a book that not only echoes my own experience of growing up in a Jewish ghetto, but that shines some light on some of the social, political and religious issues that seem to echo through our worlds on a regular basis – issues that often bring out the uglier dimensions of human nature, and our ability, as a species, to use what we perceive to be our intellectual skills, (or in many cases what proves to be our ignorance), to support beliefs and practices that speak to the baser nature of our potential for enlightenment.

The book in question appears innocent enough as it sits on my shelf: *Consilia Contra Judeos Fenerantes*, which translates roughly as: Councils Against the Jews who Lend Money at Interest. It was written by Alexander de Nevo, (ca. 1419-1485), and printed in Venice by Andreas Torresanus de Asula and Bartholomaeus de Blavis. This particular edition was completed on March 10th, 1481. It is a small quarto of only 20 leaves, measuring 212 mm x 142 mm. The text is in Latin, in small gothic type, formed double columns of 52 lines per column.



Consilia Contra Judeos Fenerantes, by Alexander de Nevo. Printed in Venice by Andreas Torresanus de Asula and Bartholomaeus de Blavis, 1481.

The publisher, Andrea Torresano of Asola (1451 - 1528) was a well-known Venetian printer of the incunable period. In 1479, he purchased the press of printing pioneer Nicolas Jenson. Torresano also became, over time, intimately connected to the greatest Venetian printers of any era, as he was the father-in-law and business associate of the great Aldus Manutius (Aldo Manuzio). Aldus was himself a scholar of extraordinary depth and knowledge who founded the Aldine printing dynasty.

It is hard to imagine that a book as small as the *Consilia* could contain so much twisted, distorted and dangerous thinking. First printed in 1476, this book became an influential late-medieval anti-Semitic work attacking the practice of moneylending with interest.

During this era – and for many centuries before it – the practice of money lending with interest was forbidden among Christians, due to perceived biblical prohibitions of this practice. This belief is rooted largely in the *Gospel of Luke*: “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish.” (Luke 6:35).

By contrast, the *Book of Deuteronomy* was explicit in saying that, while Jews could not practice moneylending for interest with other Jews, they were not prohibited from usury with those of different faiths: “Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money; usury of victuals; usury of anything that is lent upon usury. Unto a stranger thou may lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury...” (Deuteronomy 23:19-20).

For this reason, moneylending was one of the few professions that was permitted among, and relegated to, those living in European cities and villages who did not practice the Christian faith. More specifically, it became a livelihood intentionally allowed among Jews. It was generally believed that Jews become wealthy businessmen in part as a result of their practice of this profitable, yet highly risky profession.⁵ This is somewhat ironic, given that it was work that was explicitly prohibited for virtually everyone else at the time.

The historical importance of this practice, and de Nevo's fascination with it, is acknowledged by Nathan Dorn in *The Consilia of Alessandro Nievo: On Jews and Usury in 15th Century*:

"The issue of usury was important in medieval and early modern Europe.... The Third Lateran Council of 1179

enacted a proposal of Pope Alexander III to make all those who violated this prohibition subject to excommunication. This situation made it difficult for people to raise capital, and [...] many Christians were open to finding ways to work around the prohibition. One solution was to allow non-Catholics to practice moneylending. [...] Along these lines, many princes throughout Europe adopted the habit of playing host to Jewish communities so that the local Jews could practice moneylending to the benefit of local trade, industry and war-making without the threat of papal excommunication hanging over the Jews or, more importantly, over the prince who made use of them. The fact that Jews were severely restricted from entering most trades in most cities helped to establish this compromise as a trend...The Jewish Ghetto of Venice, like other enclaves of Jewish life in Europe, contributed substantially to the growth of the Venetian economy in part because of the services of moneylenders. Venice granted Jews a monopoly on pawn broking as early as 1366.”⁶

As a staunch supporter of the Church and the papacy, Alexander de Nevo proposed that – for their own good and in order that they might be saved (once they were converted to Christianity) – Jews be forbidden to practice moneylending with interest. De Nevo believed that the Church was responsible for Jewish souls, and that as a mortal sin, usury, specifically, should be a prohibited practice among Jewish moneylenders. Driving this point home in the *Consilia*, de Nevo argued that “Jews were not to charge interest to Christians,” further arguing against “the right of the very popes to grant dispensations, [even though] the regnant canonical opinion allowed such charges by Jews.”⁷

The arguments made in the *Consilia* are fairly straightforward, and are illuminated in the first section of the book in a simple question and answer format:

- Is it a sin for Jews to lend at interest? Should the Church combat this Jewish sin? The answers are yes, “for he who borrows money becomes the servant of the usurer.”
- Can rulers, city councils, or communes grant moneylending licenses to Jews? Can the pope grant dispensations to the rulers or cities, allowing them to do business with Jewish moneylenders? The answers are “no.”
- Should the Church tolerate this sin in the interest of avoiding greater evils and in the name of a greater good? The answer is “yes.” As St.

Augustine said, the Jewish rituals must be tolerated because they bore witness to the truth of the Christian faith.⁸

These arguments proved very convenient for the many Christians who continued to seek out the services of moneylenders.

To paraphrase: Ideally, and solely in order to facilitate their own salvation the practice of moneylending by Jews should be prohibited, and particular the charging of interest should be illegal. However, in order to witness to the True Faith, moneylending without interest should be permitted, ideally expediting the salvation of those Jews who converted to the Catholic faith and had not blemished their souls by the charging of interest.

We may want to think that de Nevo's bizarre arguments and self-sustaining logic were limited to an obscure theological tract that has had no historical significance, but unfortunately – and in part because the printing press made the work so readily available – teachers, friars, preachers and others regularly cited de Nevo pointedly anti-Semitic sermons, books, and broadsides. Nor was de Nevo alone in this type of thinking. His teachings on usury were largely rooted in the theological musings of a popular Franciscan preacher and missionary named Bernardino of Siena (1380 - 1444), who railed regularly against sorcery, gambling, infanticide, witchcraft, homosexuality, usury, and – of course – Jews. De Nevo built on and expanded the scope of Bernardino's railings:

"De Nevo's *Consilia* were formal legal opinion papers that "became the principal arsenal from which the Italian Franciscans drew their theoretical anti-Jewish arguments" in the [2nd half of the 15th-century]. In *Consilium* number four, after referring approvingly to the expulsion of the Jews from Padua and Vicenza just a few years prior to his writing, the canonist paraphrases the same infamous paragraph from Bernardino's sermon on usury concerning the danger that Jewish moneylenders represent to the health of a town."⁹

As icing on this rhetorical cake, a printed copy of a short letter is appended at the end of the *Consilium* (included in my copy of the book), by Francesco Condulmieri (1390 - 1453). The nephew of Pope Eugenius IV, Condulmieri was a Venetian cardinal, Archbishop of Verona (1438-53), Vice-Chancellor of the Holy Roman Church (1437-53) and Latin Patriarch of Constantinople (1438-53). This letter is dated Rome, November 17, 1441, and is addressed to the city council of Verona. In response to an inquiry from the council in Verona, he writes, [in English translation]:

Sed quo ad mām iudeorum p quibus
conducendis lniā petiti vt fenus exerce
ant. Hoc p vestra prudentia scire debetis
non eē in potestate nostra neq; alterius vi
uentis in ea re votis vestris satisfacere ob
stante dei ⁊ domini nostri prohibitōe: cui
ex necessitate salutis oīs anima vcluti eius
sublimi potestati subdita obedire tenetur
Qui lz forte in aliquibus ciuitatibus ad
mitti videā: id nō tā ex lniā que nunq; da
tur q̃ ex qdā dissimulatōe ptransit: sicut
p̃tingit in aliqb⁹ alijs i qb⁹ nullo iure nul
la honestate lniā tal' pcedi pōt. Ac p̃ auctē
absoluendi cōitatē sup ea re de p̃terio vi
cario nostro transmūtamus ⁊c.

Datū Rome. i. 7. nouēbris. M. cccc. xlii

The colophon from Consilia Contra Iudeos Fenerantes.

“As concerns the license you seek to hire the Jews to practice usury, you ought to know out of your own experience that it is not in our power or in that of any other living person to satisfy your wishes in this matter since there stands against it the prohibition of our God and Lord, which every soul subject to His sublime power is bound to obey in the interests of his salvation.”

And there you have it. For their own good, Jews must not be allowed to charge interest on their loans. De Nevo argues that as good Christians it is important to work towards the conversion and salvation of

the Jews. If, from their vast warehouses of wealth, they wish to loan good Christians funds without interest as part of paving their way towards faith and salvation, so be it. Their generosity helps them come even closer to the acceptance of a loving, Christian God.

It's remarkable how the articles of one's professed faith can become the foundation for practices that are nothing short of acts of brazen self-interest. How little human nature has changed in more than half a millennium. I shall leave it to the reader to ponder how articles of belief continue to lay the foundation for both rhetoric and practices that lay bare the baser elements of our species.

I just love collecting old books. In this case they confirm that, even as technology changes in ways that change the world, human nature stays very much the same.



Biography of author

David Wertheimer has been fascinated by rare books from an early age, and has focused his collecting on incunabula, the earliest printed books. When not engaged in his book collecting, he serves as Director of Community and Civic Engagement at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle. He is the current Editor of *The Journal of the Book Club of Washington*.

Notes

1. See, for example, John Thomson, *The Printing Press: As an Agent of Social Change*, University of British Columbia Press, 2006.
2. Katherine Lualdi and Anne Thayer, Guido de Monte Rochen's Manipulus Curatorum, *Medieval Sermon Studies*, Volume 51, 2007, Issue 1.
3. Waheed Ahmed Alhindi, The Role of Technology in Arab Spring, *Archives des Sciences*, Volume 65, Number 8, August 2012.
4. David E. Sanger, Trump's National Security Chief Calls Russian Interference 'Incontrovertible', *The New York Times*, February 17, 2018.
5. Yaron Brook, The Morality of Moneylending: A Short History, *The*

Objective Standard, Fall 2007.

6. Nathan Dorn, The Consilia of Alessandro Nievo: On Jews and Usury in 15th Century Italy, *In Custodia Legis, Law Librarians of Congress*, May 20, 2016.
7. Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, Columbia University Press, 1952.
8. Anna-Vera Sullam Caliman & Riccardo Calimani, *The Venetian Ghetto: The History of a Persecuted Community*, Electa Press, 2005.
9. Franco Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons: Bernardino of Siena and the Social Underworld of early Renaissance Italy*, University of Chicago Press, 1999.





THE BIBLIOPHILE COMMUNITY AT A BOOKFAIR

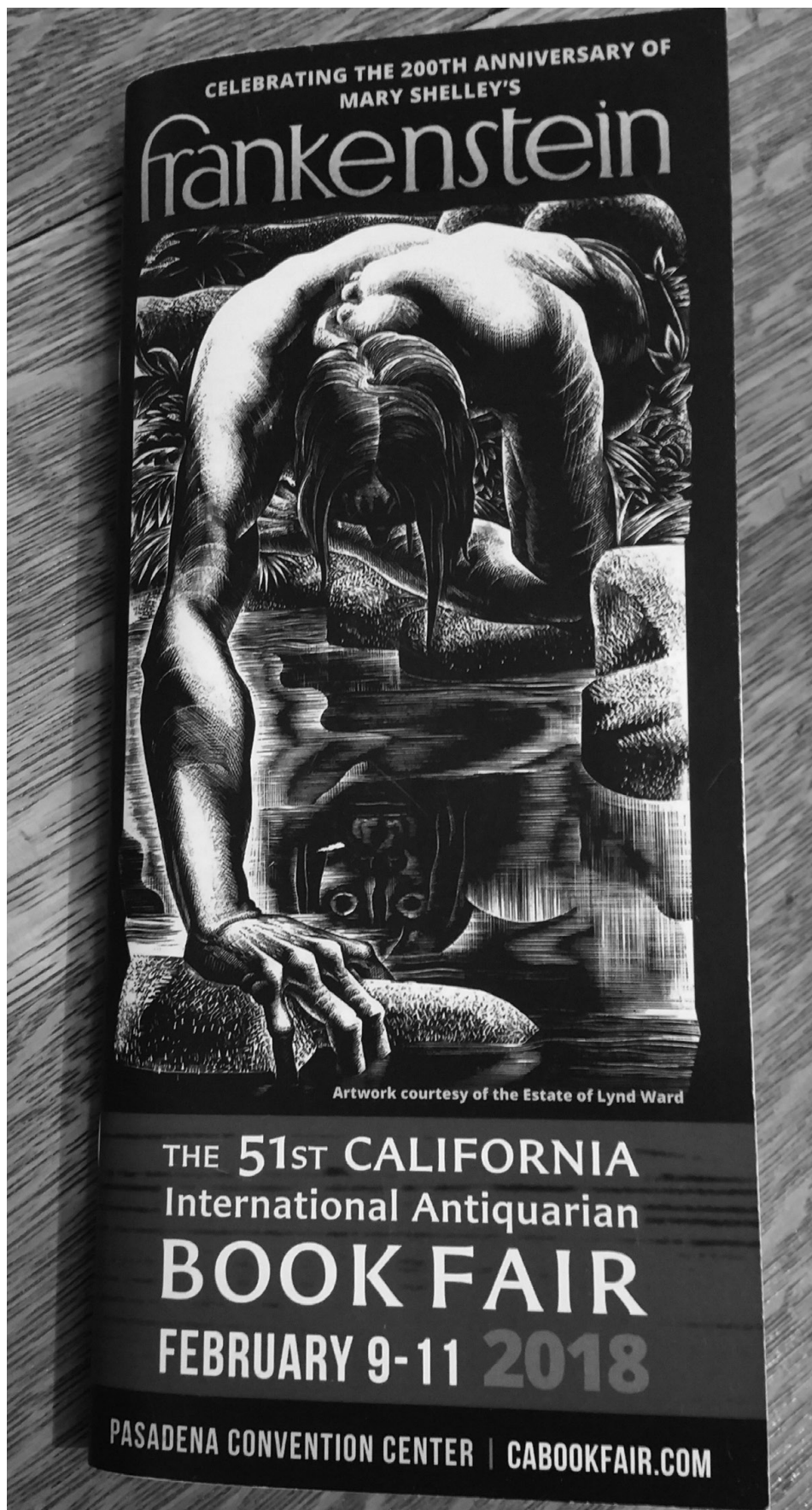
Claudia J. Skelton

Attending a book fair is the most meaningful way to connect with our bibliophile community. In my opinion, everyone who is at a book fair loves books, ephemera, maps, or other printed material. Those we see and meet at these events are book dealers, book collectors, librarians, archivists, bookcraft persons, teachers, and individuals who truly enjoy books. In an era when much can be done through digital channels – for example, finding specific titles and reading books – the bibliophile community comes together at book fairs. I attended the 51st California International Antiquarian Book Fair in February, 2018, at the Pasadena Convention Center in Pasadena, California. It was a pleasurable and informative time spent with the bibliophile community.

This book fair was one of several sponsored by the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America (ABAA) each year in various parts of the United States. The California Book Fairs alternate each year between Northern California and Southern California. I have been to many in the past and hope to attend the 52nd California International Antiquarian Book Fair in February, 2019, at Oakland, California. The ABAA is the oldest association of professional antiquarian booksellers in America. The mission of this very prestigious organization, as listed on their website, is “to promote ethical standards and professionalism in the antiquarian book trade, to encourage the collecting and preservation of rare and antiquarian books and related materials, to support educational programs and research into the study of rare books, and to facilitate collegial relations between booksellers, librarians, scholars, and collectors.”

The book fair in Pasadena had more than two hundred book dealers from around the world, making it one of the largest antiquarian book exhibitions. Of those dealers, sixty-five were from outside the United States and about one third were based in the Western United States. More than fifty dealers were from California. Besides having an exhibit hall for all the dealers, there was also an area for attendees to visit representatives and pick up information about other book related organizations. That area included representatives from the Book Club of California, the California Rare Book School, local University Special Collections, the Ephemera Society of America, Book Arts & Printing organizations, and several others.

Often the ABAA Book Fairs I have attended also include an



51st California International Antiquarian Book Fair: 88-page Program of dealer information, seminars, exhibits, and booth layout.

exhibition area with a special theme and there are seminars and lectures offered during the book fair. This year the theme of the special exhibit display cases and some of the seminars was the 200th anniversary of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. On display were numerous items from various University libraries and archives, including the first illustrated edition of *Frankenstein*, modern day comic books, and more. The seminars related to the impact of *Frankenstein* were held by various writers, professors, and librarians. Another seminar during the book fair weekend was on the essentials of how to begin collecting books. And there was also a period for attendees to get an appraisal on a couple of their books.

As I spoke with dealer friends during the fair, I would usually hear comments that they felt one of the best things about book fairs is seeing friends and spending time with them. (I agree!) I also learned about two book auctions that were being held in a nearby hotel. (Although I did review some of the books being auctioned, I did not participate in those events.) In talking with my friend (and Book Club of Washington member) Ken Karmiole, he noted that there was much highly illustrative material, interesting ephemera, and archival collections that were brought to this book fair by the dealers. Ken has participated in more than 250 fairs in his career, so he does have much experience in noting the content. He also reported that all the events – talks, seminars, etc. – were very well received. One related to *Frankenstein* had every seat filled and about 50 people standing.

The book fair was open to attendees for 19 hours over three days. I was there on the first hour, most other open hours, and on the last hour. In order to visit and look at book items from a couple hundred dealers and talk with others in the exhibition area, I needed most all of the open hours. My experience was that the book fair was very popular, with a crowd of many attendees each day. I was highly focused on the bibliophile community over the three days.

Each time I entered the book fair, I would select one of the eight aisles to visit. Using the Book Fair Program, I would review the twenty-five (or so) dealers in that aisle and their areas of specialization. For the dealer friends I know, I would stop, say hello, look at all that was on their display shelves and cases. We would often talk about their business as well as what I was most interested in at this book fair. It always felt like the happy conversations we enjoy with our friends.

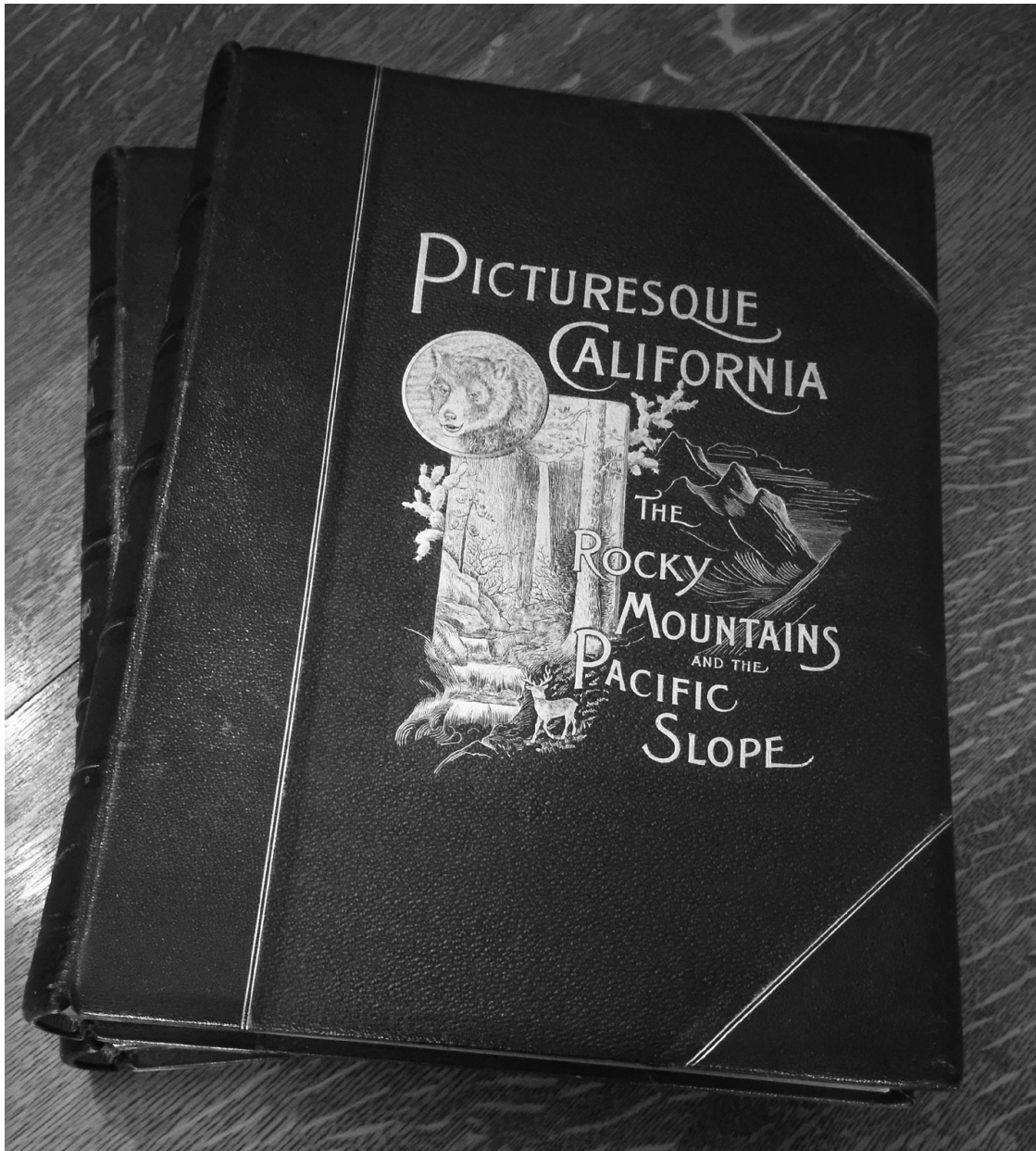
Over the book fair hours, I did manage to move through all eight aisles, greeted the dealers I know, visited with bibliophile friends in the exhibition area, and stopped in other booths that might have had items of interest. A typical day was to move through the aisles at the fair and

regularly stop and rest at the back of the exhibition hall for some coffee and more conversations. With other members from the Book Club of Washington and other bibliophile friends, we would share lunch, coffee, and breakfast. I saw some of the books they acquired; they saw some of mine. We traded information about dealers that might help each other find what we wanted. I also had very pleasant conversations with the Executive Director of Rare Book School, the Executive Director of the Book Club of California, the Director of California Rare Book School, and other supportive organizations.

I was pleased to be invited to attend two receptions during the book fair. With each one, it was another opportunity to talk with other members of the bibliophile community. A particularly meaningful reception was with the book fair dealers. As a memorial, they acknowledged the ABAA dealers who had passed away, including Seattle's Louis Collins. They also acknowledged the first in a series of tributes to women booksellers who have had a lasting impression on the American trade. The honoree was bookseller Carol Sandberg who, in addition to experience at many book organizations, has been at Michael R. Thompson Rare Books for more than three decades. It was an honor to be at the session where my friend Carol received this worthy award by her colleagues.

I ended up acquiring seven special books related to Southern California fine press and southern California history. I am pleased to have them and pleased to have discovered and acquired these books from the dealers I know and enjoy. One of my favorite benefits from looking at a particular book and talking to the dealer is that I often learn something I didn't know. Sometimes it is to discover a book that I didn't know existed. Often it is to hear the story of the book from the dealer – why it is special, how it was crafted, who the author or printer was, the circumstances surrounding the content, and more.

Of the books I acquired, I will mention here a few of them. One book was unfamiliar to me but I was enthused when I was shown that it was printed by Ward Ritchie, a Southern California fine press printer that I collect. Another book was a beautiful first edition of a key book by a poet I enjoy. I had not ever seen it, but the dealer explained the contents and why it was influential. Two other volumes from 1888 were very large and full of hundreds of etchings, photogravures, and illustrations in support of the title *Picturesque California: The Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Slope*. It was the first time I had ever seen them and I enjoyed looking at the volumes. I knew I wanted to acquire these items when the dealer showed me that the volumes had been edited by John Muir and were included in the *Zamorano Select* annotated bibliography. I was also



Picturesque California and the Region West of the Rocky Mountains, from Alaska to Mexico. 2 Volumes. Edited by John Muir. San Francisco: The J. Dewing Company, 1888.

provided with the writeup from that bibliography. I have many John Muir books and now have these picturesque volumes to add additional learnings from John Muir and others.

Learning more about each book, beyond the basic cataloging information, is incredibly engaging. Each dealer I speak with can explain more about each book than I could learn without doing much research. Some books that are listed online for purchase do include a bit more than the basic cataloging information; most do not. What I gained from the dealers of the books I acquired at this book fair is the awareness of the

books, more information, and more story.

Being at the book fair was like being at a community (or family) gathering. I saw who I know and I met others from a variety of geographies, primarily in Western America. Several dealers and attendees assured me that I would see them again at other antiquarian book fairs where we could continue with our book conversations and share some meals. When I was in the exhibition hall, I would keep walking along each aisle or would sit with some coffee at the back of the room. I felt welcome and that the attendees, the exhibitors, and the book dealers were part of my bibliophile community. A community I want to be part of for the rest of my life.



Biography of author

Claudia J. Skelton is a long-term bibliophile. A great reader of books, she has a meaningful collection of Southern California fine press items, of Southern California history, and many other subjects of books and ephemera. She serves as Vice President of the Book Club of Washington, Board member of the Seattle Public Library Foundation, and Board member of the Friends of University of Washington Libraries. She was also granted the notable 2017 Emory Award from the Book Club of Washington.



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